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## A JOURNEY THROUGH SOUTHEASTERN RUSSIA.

BY

GEORGE KENNAN.

It is becoming more and more difficult every year for the adventurous traveller and the enterprising student of geography to find a new field for exploration and study—or even a field about which anything new can be said. The blank spaces in the old maps of the world, which used to excite curiosity and stimulate the imagination with their inscription “unexplored,” have one by one been filled up with prosaic topographical details; the civilized and semi-civilized parts of the globe from North Cape to the Cape of Good Hope, and from Alaska to the Strait of Magellan, have been overrun by an army of tourists, and described in a multitude of books; and even the “antres vast and deserts idle” of Asia and Africa, which served so long as hunting-grounds for the poetic imagination, have lost all their mystery, and their inhabitants the anthropophagi, instead of devouring the unwary traveller and leaving his bones to bleach on the sands as in the good old days, now recognize him as “Cookie,” welcome him with mercenary smiles and take coupon meal-tickets for board. The world has grown small and familiar even since the beginning of the present century; and the traveller of these days, unless he is prepared to attempt the North Pole, or to plunge into the wildest and least accessible recesses of the great Asiatic mountain ranges, must be content to glean in fields where all the high geographical honors have already been reaped.

The country to which I invite your attention this even-

ing—Southeastern Russia—is one of these reaped fields, since it was explored and described, at least in part, as long ago as the days of Rubruquis and Marco Polo. It is less familiar, however, to Americans than any other part of Europe, and has never, I believe, as a whole, been made the subject of an address before this Society. It is not, perhaps, as attractive a region as one might select for the subject of a lecture, but it is a region that I know something about, and of parts of it it may be said, as De Custine once cynically said of Russia generally, “It is a country useful to every foreigner, because whoever has well examined that country will be content to live anywhere else.”

European Russia, regarded from a topographical point of view, may be described as a vast nearly level plain bounded by mountains and inland seas. It is in many respects more nearly allied to Asia than it is to Europe. The great forest zone which stretches across it from the Northern Ooral to the Gulf of Bothnia, is simply a continuation of the forest zone which belts Siberia; the fertile or black earth region of Central Russia also has its counterpart in Siberia; and the very same treeless steppes which border the Black Sea and the Caspian extend eastward through Asia more than 1,000 miles to the base of the mighty mountains of the Altai and the T'yan Shan. Even the range of the Ooral, which is supposed to make a real physical line of demarkation between Russia in Europe and Russia in Asia, is a boundary in name rather than in fact. It can hardly be called a range of mountains in the popular sense of the words. It is simply a long, wide undulation, or series of undulations, like rounded earthquake waves, rising out of the steppes on one side, and sinking into steppes or flat forest land on the other. In most

places, a traveller unfamiliar with the geography of the country would ride from Europe into Asia, or from Asia into Europe, without ever suspecting that he had crossed a range of mountains.

I made my first personal acquaintance with Southeastern Russia at the famous old city of Neezhnee Novgorod, or Lower Newtown, a city picturesquely situated on a high bluff near the junction of the Volga with its tributary, the Oka, 250 miles east of Moscow. Every year, in August and September, there is held in, or rather near, Neezhnee Novgorod the largest commercial fair in the world, and for that reason it is an excellent place to study the life and people of Southeastern Russia. The fair is not held in the city proper, but constitutes a city of itself, standing on a low peninsula of land between the rivers Oka and Volga, about a mile from the old and permanent town.

Regarded from a commercial point of view, this city or fair ground of Neezhnee Novgorod is the most important place in all Russia. It is not a fair ground in the American sense of the words. Merchandise is not brought there for exhibition; it is brought there for sale. Neezhnee Novgorod is Russia's great market. Here the agents of the producers and the agents of the consumers—500,000 traders—meet every summer to exchange merchandise for money and money for merchandise, and their transactions foot up annually to more than \$75,000,000. Hundreds of thousands of merchants of all classes and grades in Eastern Russia, Siberia and Central Asia get their whole annual supply of goods, directly or indirectly, through the Neezhnee Novgorod fair, and by its sales and purchases are regulated the prices of all the staple articles of trade throughout the empire.

The fair ground, if it may be so called, is a low, flat, but extensive tract of land lying between the rivers Oka and Volga, just above their junction, very much as New York city lies between East river and the Hudson. On this peninsula between the rivers stands a great city of shops, sheds and warehouses, regularly laid out in streets and squares, and covering perhaps 2,000 acres. Around the city, in a long, curving fringe, runs a perfect forest of masts, which, with the ceaseless whistling of steamers, testifies to the importance of the Neezhnee Novgorod fair and the vast extent of Russia's inland commerce. And along the flat, sandy shore of the rivers lies the merchandise which these vessels and steamers have brought. There are huge mounds of iron from the mountains of the Ooral; acres and acres of barrels containing dye-stuffs from Bokhara; long walls of cotton bales from Central Asia and the Caucasus; immense heaps of walrus teeth and mammoth tusks from Northeastern Siberia, and tens of thousands of boxes of tea sewed up in raw hides which have come overland from Pekin.

Back a hundred yards from the rivers begin the shops, and every street is devoted to a particular kind of merchandise. There is one street of pagoda-shaped buildings where nothing is sold except tea, another where they sell nothing but breadstuffs; and then there are the fur street, the iron street, the hide and tallow street, and dozens of others, every one of them appropriated to the sale of a particular kind of goods. But these are all wholesale stores. If you wish to buy a small quantity of anything you must go to the bazaar, which is situated near the point of the peninsula, and is crowded by almost all of the different types of humanity in Southeastern Russia. There

are Circassians selling silver daggers, belts and pistols from the Caucasus ; Persians with soft, richly-colored rugs and carpets from Teheran ; Chinaman with tea from Peking, and handsome Armenians, with dark, dreamy-looking eyes, offering silks and shawls from the looms of Khokand. But don't suppose because the Armenian has soft, poetical eyes that there is anything else soft or poetical about him, or that you can get anything from him for less than it is worth. The Russians have a proverb which says, "It takes two Russians, three Jews and the devil to cheat one Armenian." Behind those dreamy eyes there is a keen, active brain, which reads you and your most secret thoughts like an open book.

All day long this bazaar and the narrow streets leading to it from the bridge across the Oka are thronged with swarthy Tartars in round skull-caps and long, loose Khalats ; Russian peasants in greasy sheepskin coats and large basket-work shoes, with their legs swathed in dirty bandages of coarse cotton cloth and cross-gartered with hempen cords ; disreputable-looking, long-haired, long-bearded monks, who solicit aid for hospitals, receiving contributions on a small board covered with black velvet, and transferring the money as fast as deposited there to big tin boxes hung around their necks and secured with enormous padlocks ; brazen-throated peddlers selling kvas, mead, sherbet and other seductive and bright-colored drinks, together with black bread, cucumbers, long strings of dried mushrooms, brass jewelry, and large cotton handkerchiefs stamped with railroad maps of Russia ; and finally, a surging crowd of nondescript traders from all parts of the Empire.

The number of beggars on the fair ground is beyond

computation; beggars for churches, beggars for mosques, beggars for hospitals, and beggars on private account. You would suppose that all the lame, halt and blind in the Empire were there to solicit charity. I saw, one day, an old haggard woman, apparently without legs, and with one distorted arm, and a hump-backed man, both dressed in rags, riding about in a rickety cart drawn by a lame, spavined horse, the woman singing, in a cracked voice, something that sounded like a dirge, while the man rang a bell to call public attention to their accumulated misfortunes. I think it was the most artistically-contrived exhibition of utter misery that I ever witnessed, and I could not help regarding it with a feeling of blended sympathy and admiration.

Nobody knows exactly how many people there are at any given time in the fair city; but the bakers report every day the amount of bread sold, and from this a rough estimate is made of the number of persons who eat it. It ranges from 75,000 to 150,000, exclusive of the inhabitants of the old and permanent city of Neezhnee Novgorod on the bluff.

The fair ends in the latter part of September. The merchandise, which has been brought there from the remotest corners of the Empire, is all carried away by new purchasers, and early in October, the fair city, with its shops, sheds, warehouses, churches, mosques, theatres and hotels, is entirely deserted, and remains without inhabitants until the following August, when the great tide of commerce again surges into it.

One of the first things which strikes the traveller on the threshold of Southeastern Russia, unless he be more familiar with that region than I was, is the *greatness* of it,

the extent of its resources, and the intense commercial activity manifested along its principal lines of communication. I had always thought of Southeastern Russia as a rather quiet, semi-pastoral, semi-agricultural region, which produced enough for the maintenance of its own half-civilized and not very numerous population, but which, in point of commercial activity, could never bear comparison for a moment, even with our most backward States. I was not a little astonished, therefore, at Neezhnee Novgorod to find the shipping of the Volga occupying fifteen miles of river front; to learn that for its regulation there was in the city a shipping court with special jurisdiction; that the "preestan"—or as a Western steamboat-man would say, the levee—was under the control of an officer especially appointed by the Minister of Interior Communications and aided by a large staff of subordinates; that the number of steamers plying on the Volga was about equal to the number plying on the Mississippi, and a third greater than the number on the Ohio; that \$15,000,000 worth of merchandise came annually down a single tributary of the Volga, namely the Kama, a stream of which I had hardly heard; and that the navigation of the Volga, in times of prosperity, gave employment to more than six thousand vessels and nearly two hundred thousand boatmen. It may be that I ought to have known these things before, but I certainly did not, and they came upon me with the shock of a surprise.

I was also somewhat surprised at the heterogeneity of the population of the Volga basin. I had a vague impression that Russia in Europe, or at least this part of it, was inhabited exclusively by Russians; but before I had spent a week at the Neezhnee Novgorod fair, it became evident to me



that my impression was a mistaken one. In many parts of the Upper Volga basin the Russians do not constitute half of the population ; and if a traveller were willing to take a circuitous route, it would not be difficult to go from Kazan, for instance, to the Caspian sea, without mingling with true Russians at all.

In the Volga basin alone there are more than five millions of people who, ethnologically considered, are not Russians, and do not belong to the Slav stock. Among them are eighteen hundred thousand people belonging to various Finnish tribes such as the Votyaks Cheremisses, Mordvins and Choovashes ; six hundred thousand Bashkeers, a half nomadic tribe of Tartarized Finns living chiefly in the government of Oofa ; two hundred thousand Keergees and Kalmiks from Central Asia, who invaded the lower Volga region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ; and between one and two million Tartars, or as the Russians pronounce the word, Tatárs, whose ancestors came into Russia with Chingis Khan and Tamerlane. None of these tribes have blended with the Russians to any considerable extent except the Finns.

There is a widely-current saying that "If you scratch a Russian you will find a Tartar," but, like most of the semi-proverbial statements about Russia, it is erroneous and misleading. The Slavs are no more Tartars than the Germans are. They had the misfortune to live nearer the Asiatic frontier than any other European people, and so had to take the brunt of all the great Turk and Mongol invasions ; but they come from the same Aryan stock that we do, and if they are behind the rest of Europe in civilization it is not because they are half-savage Tartars or Asiatics, but because they stood between Europe and ruin

in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and were beaten down and overwhelmed by the Tartar flood which the West European nations escaped. Any saying, therefore, which attributes to the Slav the character of the Tartar is not only misleading, but unjust and ungenerous.

Ethnologically speaking, it would be much more accurate to say, "If you scratch a Russian you will find a Finn." The Russians and the Tartars have blended very little by intermarriage, partly on account of race antipathy, and partly on account of the mutual intolerance and antagonism of Christianity and Mohammedanism. The Finns, however, who, when the Slavs entered Europe, occupied the whole of what is now Northern Russia, have to a great extent become Russianized, and the process of amalgamation is going on from year to year with increasing rapidity.

Generally speaking, the population of Southeastern Russia, from Neezhnee Novgorod to the Caucasus, is more heterogeneous than that of any other part of Europe; and in all discussions of the capacity of the inhabitants of Russia for representative self-government, this heterogeneity of the population, and the different stages of civilization which the various tribes of the Empire have reached, should be steadily borne in mind.

After making as thorough a study of the Neezhnee Novgorod fair as the time at my disposal would permit, I engaged passage in a steamer of the Kavkaz and Mercury Company for the lower Volga, and on Sunday, September 6th, went on board. It was a warm, clear autumn morning, and the dense fringe of shipping which extended far up and down the Volga was bright with varicolored flags and streamers. Bells were jangling from the fantastic towers

of the white and golden churches high up on the green bluff of the old town, and across the still water of the Oka came faintly the music of a regimental band playing in the fair ground park. The whole population of both cities—the old and the new—the Russian provincial capital on one side of the river, and the huge mercantile camp on the other—was in the streets enjoying the sunshine and the holiday, and the floating ponton bridges across the Oka were thronged by peasants in Sunday attire. Amid a chorus of shouts and good-byes in a dozen languages from the crowd at the landing, the steamer swung out into the current, and started on her voyage of 1,500 miles to the Caspian.

It has been said that Egypt is the creation of the Nile. In a different sense, but with equal truth, it may be said that Eastern Russia is the creation of the Volga. The ethnological composition of its population was mainly determined by that river; the whole history of the country has been intimately connected with it for more than a thousand years; the character and pursuits of all the East Russian tribes have been greatly modified by it, and upon it now depend directly or indirectly the welfare and prosperity of more than ten millions of people.

From any point of view the Volga must be regarded as one of the great rivers of the world. Its length from the Valdai hills to the Caspian sea is more than 2,300 miles; its width below Tsareetsin in time of high water exceeds thirty miles, so that a boatman in crossing it loses sight entirely of its low banks and is virtually at sea; it washes the borders of nine governments, or administrative divisions of the Empire; and on its banks stand thirty-nine cities and more than a thousand villages and settlements.

The most important part of the river commercially is that lying between Neezhnee Novgorod and the mouth of the Kama, where there ply during the season of navigation about four hundred and fifty steamers. As far down as the so-called Samara bend, the river presents everywhere a picture of busy life and activity, being full of steamers, barges and great hulks, like magnified canal-boats, loaded with goods from Eastern Russia, Siberia and Central Asia. The amount of merchandise produced even in the mere strip of country directly tributary to the Volga itself is enormous. Many of the agricultural villages, such as Leeskova, which the steamer swiftly passes between Neezhnee Novgorod and Samara, and which seem from a distance to be insignificant clusters of unpainted wooden houses, load with grain 700 vessels a year.

For the first 300 miles after leaving Neezhnee Novgorod the direction of the Volga is nearly eastward, but just before reaching Kazan it turns to the South and for the next 900 miles runs to the S. S. W., being everywhere thrown strongly against its high right bank by the increasing swiftness of the rotation of the earth's surface as the river decreases its latitude.

The scenery of the upper part of the Volga is much more varied and picturesque than one would expect to find along a river running through a flat and monotonous country. The left bank, it is true, is generally low and uninteresting, but on the other side the land rises abruptly from the water's edge to a height of four or five hundred feet; and its boldly projecting promontories, at intervals of two or three miles, break the majestic river up into long, still reaches, like a series of placid lakes, opening one into another, and reflecting in their tranquil depths the dense

foliage of the virgin forest on one side, and the bold outlines of the half mountainous shore on the other. White walled churches with silver domes appear here and there on the bluffs, surrounded by little villages of unpainted wooden houses with elaborately carved and decorated gables; deep valleys, shaggy with hazel bushes, break through the wall of bluffs on the right at intervals, and afford glimpses of a rich farming country in the interior; and now and then, in sheltered nooks half up the mountain side overlooking the river, appear the cream-white walls and gilded domes of secluded monasteries, rising out of masses of dark green foliage. Sometimes, for half an hour together, the steamer plows her way steadily down the middle of the stream, and the picturesque right bank glides past like a magnificent panorama with a field of vision ten miles wide; and then, suddenly, to avoid a bar, the vessel sweeps in toward the land, until the wide panorama narrows to a single vivid picture of a quaint Russian hamlet which looks like an artistically contrived scene in a theatre. It is so near that you can distinguish the features of the laughing peasant girls who run down into the foreground to wave their handkerchiefs at the passing steamer, or you can talk in an ordinary tone of voice with the moozhiks in red shirts and black velvet trousers who are lying on the grassy bluff in front of the green-domed village church. But it lasts only a moment. Before you have fairly grasped the details of the strange Russian picture, it has vanished, and the steamer glides swiftly into a new reach of the river, where there is not a sign of human habitation, and where the cliffs on one side and the forest on the other, seem to be parts of a vast primeval wilderness.

Picturesque and varied, however, as the scenery of the Volga is, the traveller is not entirely dependent upon it for entertainment. Before he has gone far he is likely to discover that his fellow-passengers are quite as well worth looking at as the banks of the river. The upper deck of a Volga river steamer during the Neezhnee Novgorod fair affords the stranger a curious study in Oriental life, as it is almost certain to be crowded with natives from all parts of Asia. Persian merchants, in conical lamb's wool caps and maroon colored robes slashed with green silk, sit with crossed legs on their soft rugs smoking curious water pipes or fingering strings of wooden beads. Haughty Caucasian mountaineers stride back and forth across the deck with their hands on their long daggers, looking contempt and defiance at their Persian enemies; while flat-faced, stupid-looking Kalmik Tartars gather in groups on the forecastle around huge wooden bowls of soup and boiled rice. Religious exercises of some kind are going on nearly all the time. Five times a day a moolah or Mohammedan priest used to climb up on the bridge of our steamer and summon the faithful to prayers. In less than five minutes the whole deck would be covered with the prostrate forms of praying Moslems, all lying, like human compass needles, with their heads toward Mecca, the North Pole of their religious faith. But the river was very crooked and the unhappy worshippers had hard work of it to keep themselves accurately adjusted with reference to the holy city. Every one of them would take off his hat, boots and weapons, get out his pocket compass, ascertain the direction of Mecca, spread down his prayer rug, and then kneel, shut his eyes and begin to pray. In the meantime the steamer would go around a sharp bend

in the river, and the next time the prayer opened his eyes, he would find himself, to his horror and amazement, with his back to Mecca and his arms stretched out toward the steppes of Siberia. Of course God could not be expected to pay the slightest attention to a prayer which was breathed out in a northeasterly direction when it ought to have been headed southwest by south  $\frac{1}{2}$  south. So the disgusted Mohammedan, with a muttered curse upon the crooked rivers and the erratic steamboats of the Russian infidel, would get up, consult his pocket compass, turn around his rug and begin again on a new tack, keeping one eye open meanwhile to see that the man at the wheel did not take an unfair advantage of him and distribute his prayer all over the Russian Empire.

But the Mohammedan is not the only religion which has representatives on the steamer's hurricane deck. If you watch closely at sunset you will see one or two dark, spare, thin-featured fire-worshippers from Bakoo, standing on the western end of the bridge, their lips moving noiselessly, and their eyes fixed with an expression of intense mournful earnestness upon the great red sun as it sinks slowly into the vast steppes of Central Russia; and when it has finally gone, and the faint violet haze of a Russian twilight draws a soft veil over the distant horizon, they turn away with half saddened faces and sit down alone in silence.

Two days after leaving Neezhnee Novgorod, we made a brief stop at the large East Russian City of Kazan, and a few hours later passed the mouth of the Kama, the great highway to Siberia. Steamers ascend the Kama as far as Perm, from which point there is a railroad across the Oorals to Ekaterineburg. This railroad is now being extended to Tumen, a town 200 miles beyond Ekaterineburg,

and from Tumen there is communication, by steamer, with all points on the great Siberian river Ob and its tributaries. It will thus be possible in another year to make an uninterrupted journey of 5,000 miles, by steam, from Charing Cross, London, to the Siberian city of Tomsk—a city which lies as far north as Hudson Bay, and further east than Ceylon.

Just below the mouth of the Kama begins the great wheat-producing belt of the Volga, which extends as far south as Saratof, and includes some of the richest wheat lands in the empire. The population of the three governments of Samara, Saratof and Simbirsk, in which this wheat-producing region is mainly comprised, amounts to nearly five millions, with a density of 41 to the square mile. The most important city of the grain belt is Samara, which has a population of about forty thousand, and from which there are shipped annually, up the Volga, about ten million bushels of grain.

Day after day we steamed swiftly southward down a constantly widening river, with a level steppe stretching away on our left until it blended with the pale blue sky, and on our right a never ending series of bold abrupt bluffs, crowned with clusters of unpainted wooden houses, or lifting high in air the white crenellated walls and golden domes of ancient monasteries. For more than a thousand miles we were rarely out of sight of steamers, barges, or floating craft of one sort or another. There are on the Volga about seven hundred steamers, and the sloops, barges and barkasses are almost innumerable. Never did the river seem lonely or unfrequented. Even at night, when it was veiled in darkness and haze, we knew that it was not deserted, by the faint, far away voice of some float-



ing fisherman, singing, *Vnees po matooshka po Volga*, that song dear to the heart of every Russian boatman, "Down the Mother Volga."

At the city of Tsareetsin, on the lower Volga, we finally lost sight of everything which could by any possibility remind us of Europe. The grassy slopes and the masses of foliage which had given softness and color to the upper river landscapes entirely disappeared; the long line of bluffs, which for more than 1,000 miles had limited our vision to the westward, sank into low hillocks, and then vanished, and the Volga itself, as if it had finally made up its mind to abandon Europe and throw itself into the arms of Asia, turned sharply away to the southeast and entered the great level steppe which borders the Caspian. No description can do justice to the dreariness and monotony of this region in autumn, when the scanty steppe vegetation has been burned up by an almost tropical sun, and nothing meets the eye but a lonely, solitary waste of half-bare earth, scorched grass, dead weeds and hillocks of sand, diversified occasionally by a salt lake fringed with long, waving reeds, or a cluster of Kalmik tents. There are no trees, no fences, no cultivated fields, and no signs whatever of a settled population, except here and there a lonely Cossack station on the river bank, whose fishing boats and long rows of drying seines show that its inhabitants obtain their food from the river, and not from the barren, sun-scorched land.

At Tsareetsin virtually begins the government of Astrakhan, which has an area of 85,000 square miles, and occupies the whole of the extreme southeastern part of European Russia. It is an immense, nearly barren, generally sandy plain, bounded on the south by the Caspian,

and divided into halves by the Volga. In order that you may clearly understand its physical geography it is necessary to review briefly its geological history and its relation to the Caspian sea. There is no longer any doubt that within a comparatively recent geological period—that is during the deposition of the upper layers of the tertiary—the whole of the government of Astrakhan was covered by the waters of the Caspian ; and that at a period not much more remote, the Black sea, the Caspian and the sea of Aral, formed one great Mediterranean body of water, which covered a large part of Southeastern Russia and Western Asia, filled the basin of the Volga as far north as the Samara bend, and communicated with the Arctic ocean through a depression on the eastern side of the Ooral range. The proofs of this are abundant and conclusive. According to the computations of Major Wood, who is one of the most recent investigators of the subject, a rise of only 23 feet in the level of the water of the Black sea, would cause it to overflow into the Caspian through a depression on the northern side of the Caucasian range corresponding nearly with the line of the present river and lake of Manitch. This overflow would in time raise the level of the Caspian 108 feet, and enormously extend its area, so that it would cover a great part of Western Asia and nearly the whole of Southeastern Russia. A rise of 135 feet more would cause the united Black and Caspian seas to overflow into the sea of Aral, and a further rise of 62 feet would put all three of these seas in communication with the Arctic ocean through the depression east of the Oorals and the gulf of the Ob. There is some disagreement among Russian geologists as to the time when these three seas were thus in communication with one

another and with the polar basin, but as to the fact there is no doubt.

The characteristic fauna of the Arctic ocean can be traced through a long and almost unbroken chain of salt and brackish lakes, from the gulf of the Ob to the Aral and the Caspian, and in the last named sea are still found such hyperborean forms of marine life as the seal, the herring, the salmon and the belooga or white whale. Exactly how long ago the Caspian receded from the flat plains which now form the government of Astrakhan, it would perhaps be difficult to say; but there is a great deal of evidence to show that the time was not very remote. The Caspian steppe, as far north as Tsareetsin, has every characteristic of a recently dried up sea bottom. It is virtually treeless; its soil consists of clay mixed with sand, and is charged with salt and sulphate of magnesia; it abounds in salt lakes, no less than 700 having been surveyed and laid down on Russian maps; and most of the species of shell fish and crustacea found in these lakes are identical with those found in the Caspian. When one becomes aware that the great steppe of southeastern Russia is nothing but a recently dried up sea bottom one does not wonder so much at its barrenness and monotony.

The climate of the government of Astrakhan, and of the Aralo-Caspian basin generally, is what is known as a continental climate, that is, one which is extremely hot in summer and extremely cold in winter. Many places in the interior of the great steppe north and east of the Caspian have the summer of Constantinople, Nice and Lisbon, while their winter is only one degree warmer than that of Novaya Zemlya.

The only inhabitants of these vast dreary plains are

Asiatic nomads, who wander over them with their herds of horses, cattle and camels, and pitch their keebeetkas, or felt tents, wherever they can find the necessities of their life—water and grass. Over the steppe, on the western side of the Volga, below Tsareetsin, are scattered about 20,000 tents of the Kalmiks, a tribe of pure Mongols who invaded Southeastern Russia in the year 1630. Most of them returned shortly afterward to their original home in Central Asia, as graphically related by De Quincy in his “Flight of a Tartar tribe;” but those who happened to be on the western side of the Volga were left behind, and submitted to the authority of Russia. On the eastern side of the Volga, in the government of Astrakhan, is another tribe of nomads, known as the inner horde of the Keergees, who also comprise about 20,000 tents, and whose habits are substantially those of the Kalmiks. These two nomadic tribes, who number perhaps 200,000 souls, roam over an area in Southeastern Russia half as large as France, with herds amounting in the aggregate to 60,000 camels, 260,000 horses, 350,000 cattle, and 1,600,000 sheep.

On the 12th of September we reached the half Russian half Asiatic city at the head of the Caspian Sea, which the Tartars, with reckless hyperbole call “The Star of the Desert”—Astrakhan. It is a flat, unhealthful, comparatively uninteresting town of 50,000 inhabitants, situated on one of the islands in the delta of the Volga. It has the usual heterogeneous population of cities in Southeastern Russia, with a few additions such as Hindoos, Persians, Armenians, Jews and natives from the trans-Caucasus. Architecturally it is a straggling collection of commonplace one and two-story houses, just relieved from utter plainness by the always picturesque Russo-Byzantine churches, and the minarets of a few mosques.

Astrakhan is chiefly notable for its fisheries. It is the centre of perhaps the most remarkable fishing region in the world. According to the statements of a correspondent of the St. Petersburg *Golos* who was sent to Astrakhan about two years ago to write up the subject, the fish products of the northern end of the Caspian reach annually the enormous aggregate value of 20,000,000 roubles or \$10,000,000, a sum nearly equal to the annual product of all the fisheries of the New England States off the North American coast. The nets and seines of the Caspian sea fishermen, if laid end to end, would reach eight times across the American continent from New York city to San Francisco.

After a brief stay at Astrakhan I took a steamer of the Caspian Sea Navigation Co. for the Caucasus. The shipping of the Caspian sea in 1880, so far as it was registered in Russia, consisted of 35 steamers and 1,007 sailing vessels. Since that time, however, the number of steamers has largely increased. A single firm named Nobel & Co. engaged in the production of petroleum at Bakoo now has a fleet of 12 steamers running between Bakoo and Astrakhan with petroleum in bulk. Unfortunately, the delta of the Volga is so shallow that large sea-going steamers have great difficulty in getting into it. Most of them are obliged to stop at the so-called "Nine-foot station," 100 miles south of Astrakhan, and transfer passengers and cargo.

The gradual but steady filling up of the northern end of the Caspian by the silt, brought down by the Volga, and the lowering of the level of the sea generally, in consequence of the great evaporation from its surface, are causing the Russian Government much anxiety. Many expedients have been suggested to remedy the evil, such as

turning the Oxus into the Caspian, turning the Don into the Volga at Tsareetsin, and reopening the old channel of communication between the Caspian and Black seas, along the line of the Manitch, but none of them have been thought practicable by Russian engineers. The level of the surface of the Caspian is now about eighty-five feet below that of the Black sea, and is steadily but slowly falling, notwithstanding the enormous quantity of water poured into the Caspian basin by the Volga, the Ooral, the Kooma, the Terek, the Koor and other smaller rivers.

Late in September I landed from the Caspian sea steamer at the Caucasian port of Petrovski, just where the level Kalmik steppe begins to be broken up by the foothills of the great Caucasian range. Hiring as guide and interpreter a nondescript vagabond named Akhmet Avarski, whose knowledge of six or seven of the mountain dialects was fully counterbalanced by a record of fourteen homicides, I plunged on horseback into the rugged defiles of the Caucasian highlands.

My life for the next two months was as strange, varied and adventurous as it is possible for a traveller to live, unless he goes into the Himalayas, Thibet or the mountains of the T'yan Shan. The state of society in which I found myself in the wild ravines of Chechnia, was as rude and savage as that which Cæsar found among the barbarians of ancient Gaul; the mountain scenery was on a scale of more than Alpine grandeur; and the mountaineers of the secluded valleys, in the vicinity of what is known as the snowy range, were the most striking and original men I have ever seen.

In these fierce, proud mountaineers, I soon became deeply interested, and it was for the purpose of studying them,

rather than geography, that I three times crossed the main range, and wandered back and forth through the mountains from Daghestan to the Dariel pass.

I cannot undertake, almost at the end of a lecture, to add anything to the account I have already given this Society of the origin, history and life of the Caucasian mountaineers, but I wish to give you some idea, if I can, of their inner thoughts and character, as I became acquainted with them during these months of wandering, through their salutations, their oaths and their proverbs.

The etiquette of salutation in the Caucasus is extremely elaborate and ceremonious. It does not by any means satisfy all the requirements of perfect courtesy to ask a mountaineer how he is, or how his health is, or how he does. You must inquire minutely into the details of his domestic economy, manifest the liveliest interest in the growth of his crops and the welfare of his sheep, and even express a cordial hope that his house is in a good state of repair, and his horses and cattle properly protected from any possible inclemency of weather. Furthermore, you must always adapt your greeting to time, place and circumstances, and be prepared to improvise a new, graceful and appropriate salutation to meet any extraordinary exigency. In the morning a mountaineer greets another with, "May your morning be bright," to which the prompt rejoinder is, "And may a sunny day never pass you by." A guest he welcomes with, "May your coming bring joy," and the guest replies, "May a blessing rest on your house." To one about to travel the appropriate greeting is, "May God make straight your road"; to one returning from a journey, "May health and strength come back with rest." To a newly-married couple, "May you have sons like the

father and daughters like the mother"; and to one who has lost a friend, "May God give you what he did not live to enjoy."

Among other salutations in frequent use are : "May God make you glad"; "May your sheep be multiplied"; "May you blossom like a garden"; "May your hearth-fire never be put out," and "May God give you the good that you expect not."

The curses of the Caucasus are as bitter and vindictive as its greetings are courteous and kind-hearted. I have often heard it said by the Persians and Tartars who live along the Lower Volga that there is no language to swear in like the Russian, and I must admit that they illustrated and proved their assertion, when occasion offered, in the most fluent and incontrovertible manner; but I am convinced, after having heard the curses of experts in all parts of the East, that for variety, ingenuity and force the profanity of the Caucasian mountaineers is unsurpassed. They are by no means satisfied with damning their adversary's soul, after the vulgar manner of the Anglo-Saxon, but invoke the direst calamities upon his body also; as, for example: "May the flesh be stripped from your face"; "May your heart take fire"; "May eagles drink your eyes"; "May your name be written on a stone" (that is, a tombstone); "May the shadow of an owl fall on your house" (this, owing probably to the rarity of its occurrence, is regarded as a fatal omen); "May your hearth-fire be put out"; "May you be struck by a hot bullet"; "May your mother's milk come with shame"; "May you be laid on a ladder" (alluding to the Caucasian custom of using one of the house-ladders as a bier); "May a black day come upon your house"; "May the earth swallow



you"; "May you stand before God with a blackened face"; "Break through into hell" (that is, through the Mohammedan bridge of Al Sirat); "May you be choked with blood."

Besides these curses, all of which are uttered in anger, the mountaineers have a number of milder imprecatory expressions which they use merely to give additional force or emphasis to a statement. A man, for instance, will exclaim to another: "Oh, may your mother die—what a splendid horse that is!" or, "May I eat all your diseases if I didn't pay twenty-five *abaz* for that dagger in Tiflis." The curious expression, "May your mother die," however malevolent it may sound to occidental ears, has in the Caucasus no offensive significance. It is a mere rhetorical exclamation point intended to express astonishment or to fortify a dubious statement. The graphic curse, "May I eat all your diseases" if something isn't so, is precisely analogous to the American boy's "I hope to die if it isn't true."

Generally speaking, the mountaineers use angry imprecations and personal abuse of all kinds very sparingly. Instead of standing and cursing one another like enraged Billingsgate fish-women, they promptly cut the Gordian knot of their misunderstanding with their long double-edged daggers, and presently one of them is carried away on a ladder. When, as a Caucasian proverb asserts, "it is only a step from the bad word to the knife," even an angry man is apt to think twice before he curses once.

It is difficult to select from the proverbs of the Caucasian mountaineers any which are certainly and peculiarly their own. They inherit the proverbial philosophy of all the

Aryan and Semitic races, and for the most part merely repeat, with slight variations, the well-worn saws of the English, the Germans, the Russians, the Arabs and the French. I will give, however, a few specimens which I have not been able to find in modern collections, and which are probably of native inventions. It will be noticed that they are all more remarkable for force, and for a peculiar grim, sardonic humor than for delicacy of wit or grace of expression. Instead of neatly running a subject through with the keen, flashing rapier of a witty analogy, as a Spaniard would do, the Caucasian mountaineer roughly knocks it down with the first proverbial club which comes to hand, and the knottier and more crooked the weapon, the better pleased he seems to be with the result. Whether the work in hand be the smiting of a rock or the crushing of a butterfly he swings high overhead the hammer of Thor. Compare, for example, the French and the Caucasian methods of expressing the fact that the consequences of bad advice fall on the advised and not on the adviser. The Frenchman is satisfied to simply state the obvious truism that advisers are not payers, but the mountaineer, with forcible and graphic imagery, declares that "he who instructs how to jump does not tear his mouth, but he who jumps breaks his legs." Again, the German has in his proverbial storehouse no more vivid illustration of the wilfulness of luck than the saying that "a lucky man's hens lay eggs with double yolks"; but this is altogether too common and natural a phenomenon to satisfy the mountaineer's conception of the power of luck, so he coolly knocks the subject flat with the audacious hyperbole, "A lucky man's horse and mare both have colts." Fortune and misfortune present

themselves to the German mind as two buckets in a well, but to the Caucasian mountaineer "fortune is like a cock's tail on a windy day" (that is, first on one side and then on the other). The Danes assert guardedly that "he loses least in a quarrel who controls his tongue," but the mountaineer cries out boldly and emphatically, "Hold your tongue and you'll save your head"; and in order that the warning may not be forgotten, he inserts it as a sort of proverbial chorus at the end of every paragraph in his oldest code of written law. It is not often that a proverb rises to such dignity and importance as to become part of the legal literature of a country; and the fact that this particular proverb should have been chosen from a thousand others and repeated twenty or thirty times in a brief code of criminal law, is very significant of the character of the people.

Caucasian proverbs rarely deal with verbal abstractions, personified virtues, or vague intellectual generalizations. They present their ideas in hard, sharp-edged crystals, rather than in weak verbal solutions, and their similes, metaphors and analogies are as distinct, clear-cut, and tangible as it is possible to make them. The German proverb, "He who grasps too much lets much fall," would die a natural death in the Caucasus in a week, because it defies what Tyndall calls "mental presentation"; it is not pictorial enough; but let its spirit take on a Caucasian body, introduce it to the world as "You can't hold two watermelons in one hand," and it becomes immortal. Vivid imagery is perhaps the most marked characteristic of Caucasian proverbs. Wit, wisdom and grace may all occasionally be dispensed with, but pictorial effect, the possibility

of clear mental presentation, is a *sine qua non*. Aiming primarily at this, the mountaineer says of an impudent man, "He has as much shame as an egg has hair"; of a garrulous one, "He has no bone in his tongue," or, "His tongue is always wet"; of a spendthrift, "Water does not stand on a hillside," and of a noble family in reduced circumstances, "It is a decayed rag, but it is silk."

All these metaphors are clear, vivid and forcible, and the list of such proverbs might be almost indefinitely extended. With all their vividness of imagery, however, Caucasian sayings are sometimes as mysterious and unintelligible as the darkest utterances of the Delphian oracle. Take, by way of illustration, the enigmatical proverb, "He lets his hasty pudding stand over night, hoping that it will learn to talk." Only the rarest penetration would discover in this seemingly absurd statement a satire upon the man who has a disagreeable confession to make or an unpleasant message to deliver, and who puts it off until to-morrow, hoping that the duty will then be easier of performance. Again; what would a West European make of such a proverb as the following: "If I had known that my father was going to die, I would have traded him off for a cucumber." Our English cousins, with their characteristic adherence to facts as stated, would very likely cite it as a shocking illustration of the filial irreverence and ingratitude of Caucasian children; but an American, more accustomed to the rough humor of grotesque statement, would see at once that it was not to be "taken for cash," and would understand and appreciate its force when he found its meaning to be that it is better to dispose of a perishable article at half price than to lose it altogether—better to sell your father for a cucumber than have him die on your hands.

The cruel, cynical, revengeful side of the mountaineer's character finds expression in the proverbs, "A cut-off head will never ache," "Crush the head and the tail will die of itself," "If you can't find a Lak (a member of a generally detested tribe), hammer the place where one sat," "What business has a blind man with a beautiful wife," "The serpent never forgets who cut off his tail, nor the father who killed his son." The lights and shades of polygamous life appear in the sharply contrasted proverbs, "He who has two wives enjoys a perpetual honeymoon," and "He who has two wives doesn't need cats and dogs." The bad consequences of divided responsibility are indicated by the proverb, "If there are too many shepherds the sheep die." And the value of a good shepherd is stated as tersely and forcibly as it well could be in the declaration that "A good shepherd will get cheese from a he goat."

Caucasian proverbs, however, are not all as rude, unpolished and grotesque as most of those quoted. Some of them are simple, noble and dignified; the undistorted outcome of the higher and better traits of the mountaineer's character. Among such are "Dogs bark at the moon, but the moon does not for that reason fall upon the earth," "Blind eyes are a misfortune, but a blind heart is worse," "He who weeps from the soul weeps not tears but blood," "Generous words are often better than a generous hand," "A guest, a man from God," and finally that really noble proverb, "Heroism is endurance for one moment more." No words could better express the steady courage, the unconquerable tenacity, the proud, silent fortitude of a true Caucasian highlander. At all times and under all circumstances, in pain, in peril, and in the hour of death, he holds

with unshakable courage to his manhood and his purpose. Die he will, but yield never. The desperate fifty years' struggle of the Caucasian mountaineers with the bravest armies and ablest commanders of Russia, is only a long blood-illuminated commentary upon this one proverb.

I do not know whether these greetings, curses and proverbs are as significant to you as they are to me of the character of the people who invented them ; but you must, I am sure, admit that they afford at least indications of great latent capability, of unusual versatility of talent and of a wide range of human sympathy and feeling.

My life in the Eastern Caucasus for two months after leaving Petrofski, was in every sense of the words a vagabond life. Day after day and week after week I wandered from village to village, through the magnificent scenery of Daghestan, now climbing above the clouds to lonely shepherds' huts on the mountains, ten thousand feet above the sea, then descending into gloomy valleys almost as deep and wonderful as the cañons of Colorado, and sleeping every night in the little stone houses of the mountaineers. Sometimes, in parts of the mountains which were regarded as dangerous, I travelled in state with an armed escort of twenty-five or thirty Russian cavalymen ; sometimes I walked from one settlement to another with strolling Jews, and ate my supper out of an iron kettle with a pine splinter and a wooden spoon. Everywhere I was treated by the mountaineers with unvarying kindness and hospitality, and when I was finally driven out of the mountains of Daghestan by snow and winter weather, I turned my face homeward with reluctance and regret.

About the middle of November I proceeded by the chain

of Cossack stations known as the armed line of the Terek from the northern boundary of Daghestan to the Russian settlement of Vladi Kavkaz, crossed the Caucasian range through the Dariel pass to Tiflis, and on the 27th of November took a steamer for Constantinople at Poti, the port of the Caucasus on the Black sea, where my journey through Southeastern Russia ended.